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## California Postsecondary Education Commission

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# Public Higher Education Performance Accountability Framework Report: Goal - College Readiness Measure: Percentage of the Population with High School Diplomas

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*A Commission analysis of high school completion rates shows that the percentage of young adults with a high school diploma is lower in California than in most other states.*

*In California, high school completion rates vary greatly with age and time of residency in the United States. Completion rates for Latinos are lower than other ethnic groups. Latinos who entered the United States at school age or as adults have substantially lower completion rates than Latinos who were born in the U.S. or entered before school age.*

*Older Asians who entered the U.S. after school age also have lower completion rates than younger Asians. Language skills may be an obstacle to bringing these segments of the population up to a level where they are ready to re-enter the education system and train for more rewarding careers.*

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*The Commission advises the Governor and the Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the State's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at [www.cpec.ca.gov](http://www.cpec.ca.gov).*

### Introduction

One of the goals of California's public education system is to give all of the state's residents the opportunity to continue their education as adults and position themselves for a rewarding career. However, these opportunities are often limited for people who have not graduated from high school. A high school diploma is now the minimum qualification needed for any job that offers advancement to a skilled level. Most college programs that provide training for better-paid careers require academic skills at least at the high school level.

Because high school completion is a gateway to almost any sort of advancement in life, the percentage of the population with a high school diploma is one of the measures in the Commission's Performance Accountability Framework for higher education. The percentage of young adults with a high school diploma is helpful in assessing how well California high schools and adult schools are doing in preparing students for postsecondary education. Figures for various age groups tell us how preparation of adults for postsecondary education has changed over time, particularly for people who did not enter college directly after high school.

### Young adults

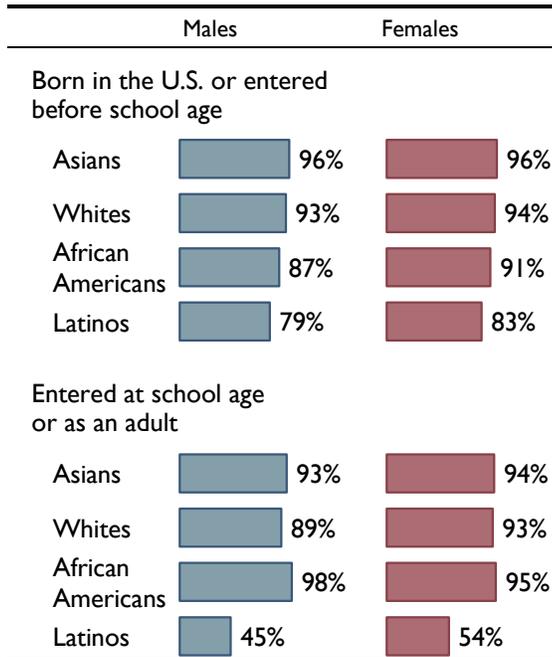
In 2005, nearly 90% of California residents who lived in the United States during their school years had a high school diploma. Like most statistics on educational performance, high school completion rates vary with race/ethnicity and gender. Asians have the highest completion rates, with 96% holding a high school diploma (see Display 1 on page 2). Rates for African Americans and Latinos are

well below the figures for Asians and Whites. African Americans and Latinos also have more of a gender gap with lower high school completion rates for males than for females.

High school completion rates for people educated in the U.S. tell us how well our K-12 schools are doing, but figures for the population as a whole are a better measure of the challenges we face in providing all California residents the opportunity to advance in life. High school completion rates tend to be lower for people who entered the U.S. at school age or as adults, so that overall, 82% of California residents aged between 19 and 25 have a high school diploma.

The differences between U.S.-educated residents and those who entered the U.S. during or after their school years are particularly high for Latinos. Because of these differences, comparisons with other states or analyses of trends can be misleading unless the figures are broken down in a way that shows the effect of the ethnic composition of the population and time of residency in the U.S.

**DISPLAY 1 Percent of California 19–25 Year Olds with a High School Diploma**



The Asian category includes Filipinos and Pacific Islanders. The African American category includes African Americans and immigrants of African origin. Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005 American Community Survey.

**Year at which Different Age Groups Completed High School**

People who were this age in 2005	Turned 18 in these years
19 to 25	1998–2004
26 to 33	1990–97
34 to 43	1980–89
44 to 53	1970–79
54 to 63	1960–69

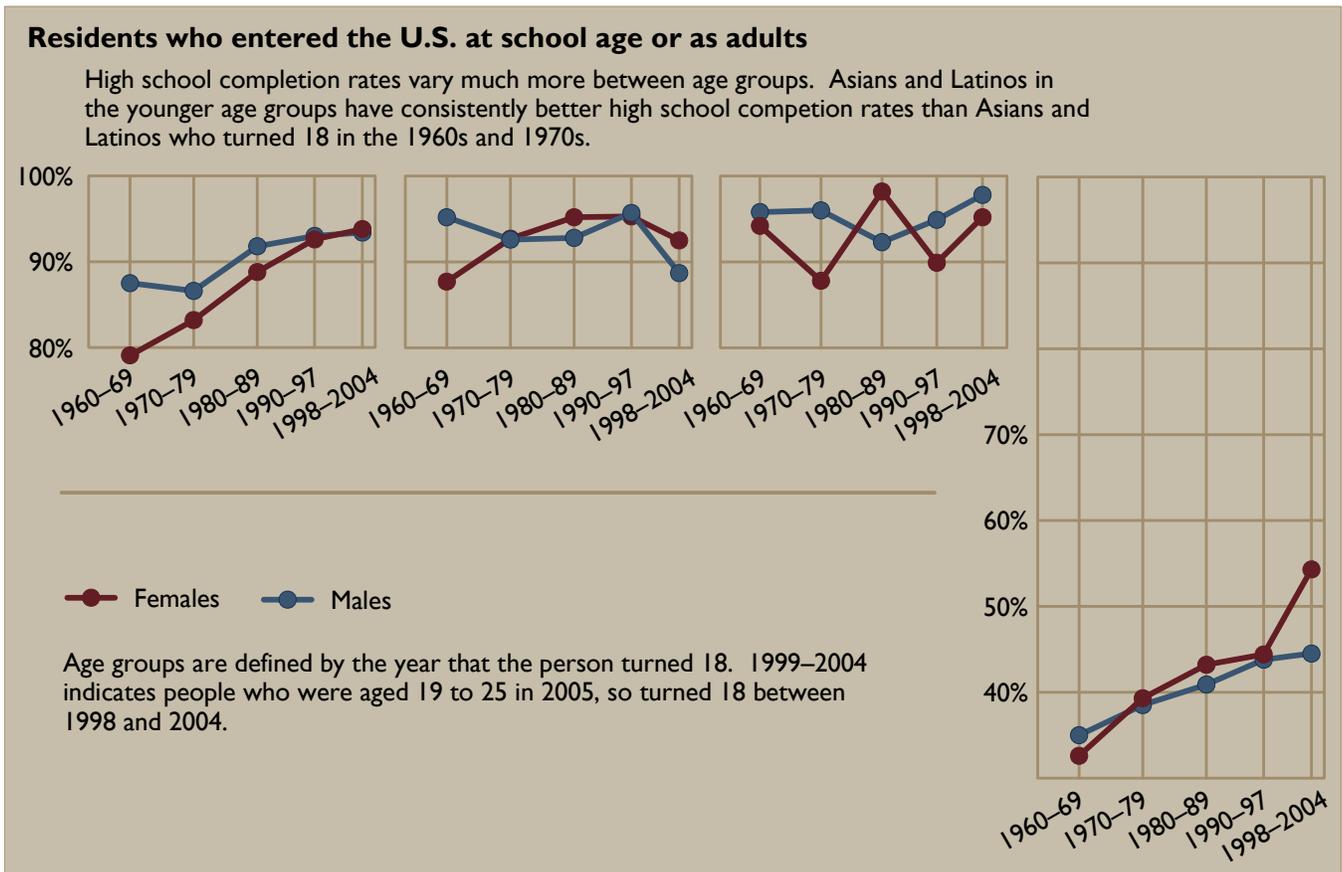
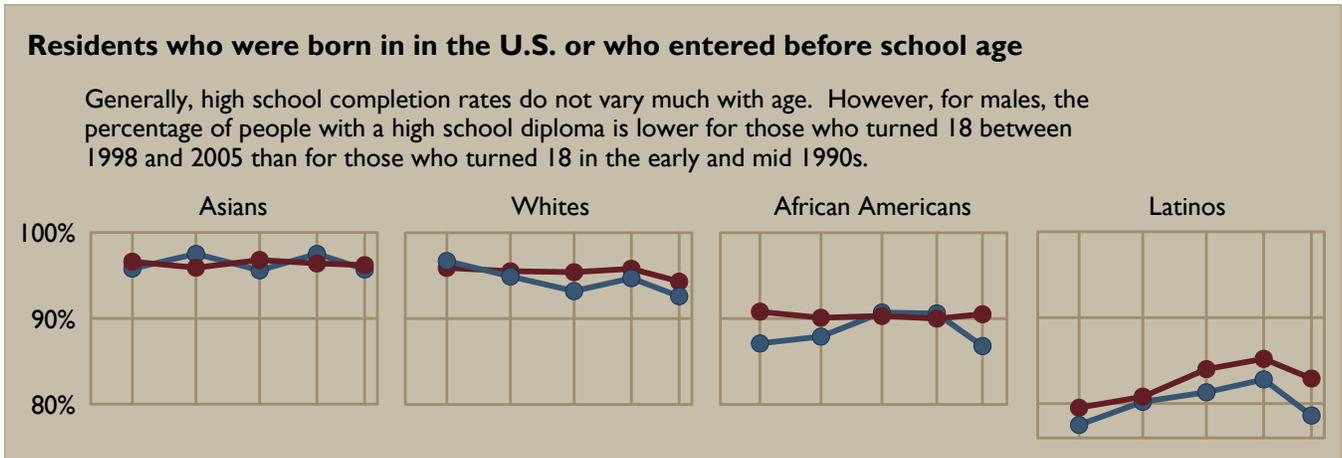
**Public Higher Education Accountability Framework**

The public’s investment in higher education should be measured by outcomes. As the California’s independent higher education planning and coordinating body, the Commission is in a unique position to assess performance without bias or conflict of interest. Under State law, the Commission is the only public agency with the data needed to assess student success across the University of California, California State University and California Community College systems. The Commission uses these data, coupled with other relevant State and national higher education data, to compile the performance assessment presented here. The Commission has put a priority on improving public confidence in the administration and delivery of public postsecondary education by increasing public knowledge of student outcomes, transparency of higher education decision making, and efficient achievement of a well educated and prepared workforce and population.

## Other age groups

When averaged over the entire population, the percentage of people with a high school diploma does not vary much with age. About 83% of California residents who turned 18 in the 1970s have a high school diploma, compared with 80% of those who turned 18 between 1980 and 1997, and 82% for the 19-to-25 age group who turned 18 between 1998 and 2005.

**DISPLAY 2 Percent of California Population with a High School Diploma**



These figures may give the impression that the ability of students to complete high school has been fairly stable over the past few decades. However, these averages hide some important differences. Completion rates for White, Asian, and African American women who lived in the United States during their school years do not vary much across age groups (see graph on page 3). But for males, high school completion rates are lower in the younger age groups. For Latino and African American males, there is a particularly strong drop in the percentage with a high school diploma between those who turned 18 between 1980 and 1997, and those who turned 18 between 1998 and 2005.

Completion rates for California residents who entered the U.S. during or after their school years vary much more with age. The variation is particularly striking for Latinos. Only about one-third of those who turned 18 in the 1960s have a high school diploma compared with nearly half of those who turned 18 between 1998 and 2005. For females, the percentage with a high school diploma was 54 % for those who turned 18 between 1998 and 2005, compared with 44% for the next-oldest age group.

This increase in high school completion rates for immigrants is certainly welcome news, but it tends to mask differences between age groups for U.S.-educated Latinos. High school completion rates for U.S.-educated Latinos are lower for people who turned 18 between 1998 and 2005 than for people who turned 18 between 1990 and 1997. Because Latinos who entered the U.S. at school age or as adults account for one quarter of 19–25-year-old Latinos, this drop in high school completion rates for the U.S.-educated population is hidden when the figures are averaged over ethnic groups without regard for time of residency in the U.S.

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### **Source of data**

All figures in this report are derived from the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS).

The ACS is conducted annually the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The survey consists of an extensive series of questions on income, education, employment, and a variety of other topics. The survey is conducted by mail. Nonresponding households are contacted by telephone and by personal visits in which Census staff collect data by interview. The follow-up procedure ensures that responses are collected from the full range of U.S. residents including those who may have difficulty in completing a mail questionnaire.

The PUMS consists of individual survey responses from a subsample of nearly 3 million people. The California PUMS consists of responses from 335,000 people. More information on the ACS is available at [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

### **Age groups used in this report**

The age groups used in this report differ slightly from those specified in the Commission's June 2006 performance accountability report. Initially, the performance measures were based on the 18–24 and 25–49 age groups. However, the 18–24 age group includes some students who are still at high school and have not yet graduated. Figures for the 19–25 age group give a better estimate of percentage of young adults who are high school graduates.

The 25–49 age group includes everyone who turned 18 between and 1974 and 1999. The more detailed breakdown used here gives a better picture of the way that high school completion rates vary with age.

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## Comparisons with other states

When averaged over all residents, California is in the *bottom* ten states for the percentage of 19–25-year-olds with a high school diploma. Of the 15 *largest* states, only Georgia and Texas have a lower percentage of young adults with a high school diploma (see Display 3).

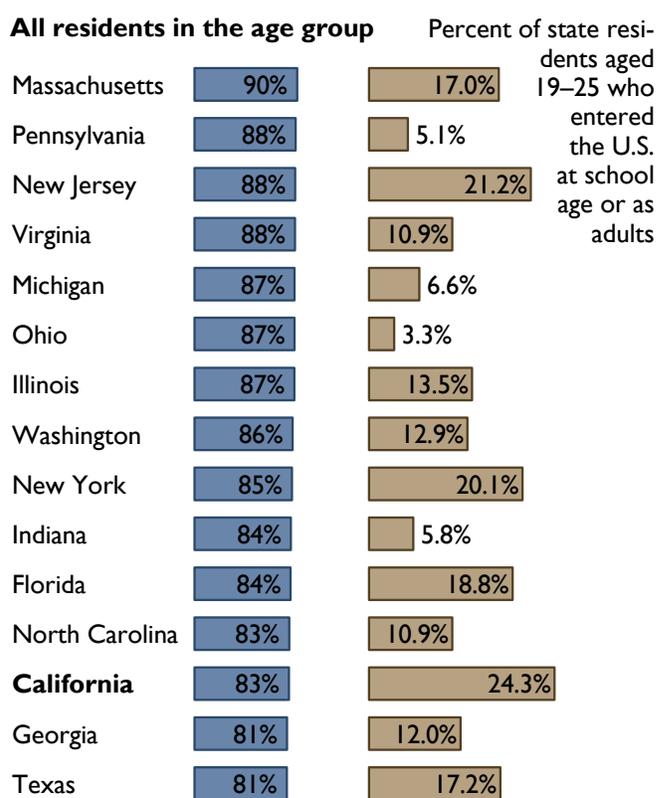
In California, high school completion rates are lower for people who entered the U.S. at school age or as adults, but states with a high percentage of young adults in this category do not necessarily have low high school completion rates. Over 20% of young adults in New Jersey entered the U.S. during or after their school years, yet the percentage of high school graduates there is among the highest of all the states.

Restricting the comparison to people who completed their K-12 education in the U.S. improves California’s position. On this basis, California is in the top five of the 15 largest states and slightly above the national average of 88%.

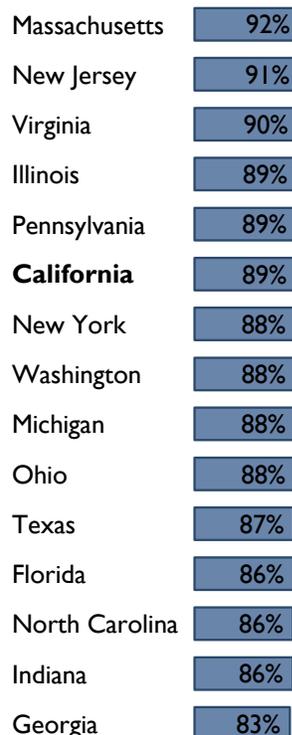
The map on page 6 shows figures for the contiguous states. States in the northeast and the upper Midwest tend to have a higher proportion of young adults with a high school diploma, and states in the deep South tend to have a low percentage of high school completers, but otherwise there is little in the way of obvious factors that link states at the top and bottom ends of the scale. For example, Delaware has a low percentage of high school completers, yet is an urbanized east coast state. Nevada has lower completion rates than neighboring western states.

The percentage of young adults with a high school diploma in a state is the outcome of many factors including performance of the state’s K-12 system, the stringency of the state’s graduation requirements, migration of young adults from other states as well as foreign immigration.

**DISPLAY 3 Percent of State Residents Aged 19–25 with a High School Diploma**



### Residents born in the U.S. or who entered before school age



Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey  
Values shown for the largest 15 states



the CDE. Graduation rates, standardized test performance, and college preparatory course completion can form the basis for useful performance measures. These measures are discussed in other reports in the Commission's Performance Accountability series.

Nevertheless, figures for the entire 19–25 age group from the American Community Survey are useful in other ways. The ACS data include information not available in the K-12 data, such as country of origin, citizenship, and year of entry to the U.S. In developing this report, Commission staff conducted a more detailed breakdown of high school completion rates by age of entry to the U.S. One troubling finding is that there is little difference in high school completion rates between Latinos who entered the U.S. at middle school and high school age and those who entered as adults. This shows that Latinos who entered the U.S. at early school age are not succeeding at California high schools and are doing no better than those who completed high school in their home countries and entered the U.S. as adults.

High school completion rates for people over 25 show the proportion of the population who will have difficulty in re-entering the education system because they lack the basic preparation for college work. The rates are particularly low for Latinos and, to some extent, older Asians who entered the U.S. at school age and older.

English-speaking ability may be an obstacle to advancement in these segments of the population. Analyses in other reports in the Commission's Performance Accountability series shows that English language skills are an important driver of incomes. A more detailed analysis of the relationship between English language skills, educational levels, incomes, and occupations would help assess what the state needs to do to bring more of the adult working age population up to a level where they have the opportunity to re-enter the education system and train for more rewarding careers.

## **Next steps**

As the Commission continues work on its Accountability Framework, it will refine how to measure progress toward the goal of giving all California residents the opportunity to enter and succeed at college. The goal of providing all California high school students with this opportunity can be measured using graduation rates, test scores, and other data from the K-12 system. These measures are discussed in other reports in the Commission's Accountability series.

The Commission will also refine its assessments of how opportunities for older students fits into its Accountability Framework. An important reason to have a publicly-funded higher education system is that it offers the chance of an affordable education to people who did not enter directly after high school. The percentage of the population with a high school diploma is a partial measure of this ability, but it would be useful to supplement this information with data on enrollments, progress, and success of students entering from the workforce.

The Accountability Framework does not currently include specific goals related to opportunities for students entering from the workforce. Some students may wish to enter the higher education system in their early twenties, perhaps because their circumstances prevented them from taking advantage of higher education when they finished high school. Others may wish to enter later in their working life, to improve their job skills or to qualify for a new career.

Service to older students is particularly important because a significant proportion of the California population will spend part of their working life in low-paid, low-skilled occupations. Two-thirds of California jobs are in occupations that require only a high school education, some postsecondary education, or on-the-job training. Many of these jobs are poorly paid. A 2005 Commission analysis of labor force data showed that 30% of California workers are in jobs with a median wage of \$10 per hour or

less. Many of these workers will seek opportunities to become qualified for better-paying occupations. Because of the importance of these issues, the Commission will develop measures to assess the accessibility of postsecondary education to workers who wish to become qualified for more rewarding careers by completing a degree.